

## ["Bill" Knox]

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Conn [1938-9?]

"Bill" Knox:

"Hi, kiddo, how are ya today? Me? I's fulla ginger and rarin' to go, but I hain't got no place to go to. Set down, set down and rest yer hands and face. Did ya see the fella stayin' down at Fisher's? Nice fella to talk to, hain't he? I never knew him very well, he moved outa here 'bout the time I come round these parts. But I got talkin' to him down to the gas station the other day, and soon's he found out I was a knifemaker we began to swap stories. He tell you anything about his grandfather? He didn't? His grandfather was a kind of boss knifemaker in the old country, he told me.

"Funny the way they passed the trade on from father to son, wa's't it? I recollect Tom Benson down t' the Bridge. He's dead and gone now, poor fella. His son Joe they said didn't want to learn the trade. Wanted to keep on with his schoolin'. Old Tom said nosir, kiddo, you're goin' to work in the knife shop like your daddy and your grandaddy did, and no more nonsense about it. Well Joe went in the shop, but he didn't stay. He run away and went out west or somethin' and they hain't heard from him since.

"Old Tom was a great hand with one of them hand drills. Ever hear tell of them? They used 'em for drillin' out the shields and like that. Damndest lookin' things you ever see, kiddo. Looked just like a man playin' the fiddle, when a fella was operatin' one of them things. They strapped 'em around their waist and away they went. Said their bellies used to get pretty sore from that pull on 'em all the time. But you think you could get one of them old johnnies to admit that power machinery was better? Not on your life, kiddo.

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"They didn't want to change anything about the business. Wanted to keep it the same as it was when Hector was a pup. And kiddo, maybe they were right. They were makin' knives as good as they could be made. What was the sense in doin' any different, that's the way they looked at it.

"But of course they were up against the manufacturers. Hain't nobody ever beat them fellas yet, kiddo. You may be right or you may be wrong, but you might's well string along with what they say because they're goin' to have the last word anyway. Hain't nobody beat 'em yet.

"Whattya think is the matter with business now? They don't seem to be able to get goin'. Tell me they're goin' to lay off a big bunch at the mill tonight. That looks bad, kiddo, when they start layin' 'em off at the mill. Lookit the way they kept them on the payroll all durin' depression. Often wisht I's workin' there myself. Kept you on the payroll, no matter how bad times got, give you a coupla days work a week. Now they're gonna start layin' 'em off, they say. Say business is bad, they hain't no help for it.

"What's the town gonna do? s'posin' they lay off fifty men, some of them are goin' to be family heads, kiddo, they ain't all single men. And they can't go on supportin' their families without work. Ask me, I can tell you about that. And then they're gonna have to go to the town, same's I did. I put it off long's I could and finally I hadda go. 'dick,' I says to the selectman, 'I stayed away as long's I could,' I says, 'but now I have to have help.' He says, 'I know it, Bill,' he says, 'you done pretty good. I been expectin' you before this.'

"Well, what's the town gonna do, s'posin' they get fifteen or twenty 3 more families to take care of? They're carryin' all they can stand right now. Taxes bound to go up, that's all. And then the big fellas will begin to squawk. Talk about movin' outa town and all that.

"See what they done over in Terryville? They give the help a ten per cent cut, and the union voted to take it, and now they're askin' for a forty thousand dollar reduction in their

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tax assessment. Town's got to do them fellas a lot of favors these days. Claim they can go somewheres and get work done cheaper. Claim they're gonna move right out of New England and go south. Get coolie labor down there, kiddo. That's what they're tryin' to do around here, if they find out they can get away with it."